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Compliments of
J. B. Oakleaf
November 1867

"In God We Trust."

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.—*Ps. 127-1.*

And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.—*Declaration of Independence.*

It would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves.—*Washington, in his first Inaugural Address.*

And may that Being who is supreme over all, the Patron of Order, the Fountain of Justice, and the Protector, in all ages of the world, of virtuous liberty, continue His blessing upon this nation and its government.—*John Adams, in his Inaugural Address.*

And may that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for our peace and prosperity.—*Thomas Jefferson, in his first Inaugural Address.*

Having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts.—*Abraham Lincoln, in his first Message to Congress.*

J. B. Oakleaf

Abraham Lincoln

ADDRESS BY

MR. J. F. DOWNING

On the occasion of the celebration of Lincoln's Birthday,
at Erie, Pa., February 12, 1903.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the few moments allotted to me as one of the speakers on this occasion, I wish to call attention to a single characteristic of Abraham Lincoln, which cannot fail to impress all who believe, as he did, in an All-wise Superintending Providence in the affairs of men and of nations. For four long and weary years he bore a burden such as has fallen upon few men—a burden as weighty as that which rested upon the great law-giver of Israel, to whom, in some respects he has been likened—and that burden was made bearable largely because of his faith in the eternal justice of the Great Ruler of the Universe, to whom he was wont to go in earnest prayer and supplication, in times of sore distress and trouble; when the heavens lowered and the way before him seemed dark and uncertain. The belief of this great and good and honest-minded man in a Divine Providence—in the existence of the Most High that “doeth his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth”—should have a saving influence upon all who are disposed to ignore or ridicule such a thing as a Superintending Providence in the affairs of the world.

Prior to his inauguration as President in 1861, and while at his home in Illinois, there were a good many earnest friends of the government all over the land—in the South as well as in the North—who feared that Mr. Lincoln did not grasp the situation; that he was not equal to the emergency in experience and mental ability; that he was disposed to treat too lightly or in an indifferent manner the dangers that confronted him and the country. This was, perhaps, due in part to the fact that Mr. Lincoln, in some of his public utterances at the time, was disposed to take a hopeful view of the situation, suggesting

that the dangers ahead were not as great as they seemed to many to be. But we know now that all these misgivings were without real foundation; we know now that Mr. Lincoln during all the time between his election and inauguration as President, was most profoundly impressed with the gravity of the situation. Though of a brave heart, and confident that God would execute justice and judgment in due time, he looked forward to what appeared to him to be before him with fear and with trembling. To an old and valued friend, who called upon him at his home in January, he said: "I see the duty devolving upon me. I have read, upon my knees, the story of Gethsemane, where the Son of God prayed in vain that the cup of bitterness might pass from him. I am in the garden of Gethsemane now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing." That was a heart confession, spoken as one friend speaketh to another, and not meant for the world at large. As the President-elect was about to leave his home for the seat of government, his friends and neighbors gathered about him to bid him good-bye, to whom he spoke those words of farewell with which you are familiar, concluding as follows: "I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

It has been said that "God always favors the heaviest battalions;" and Napoleon said "Providence is always on the side of the last reserve." This may not be inconsistent with what President Lincoln said in his first inaugural address, when, speaking to the people of the North and of the South, he said: "If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with His eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of the great tribunal of the American people." In this we see an expression of faith that the "heaviest battalions" and the "last reserve" would be eventually found on the side of truth and

justice, which he evidently believed to be on the side of the North; that the time would surely come when "the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land would yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they would be, by the better angels of our nature."

In his first message to Congress, July, 1861, President Lincoln, having expressed clearly and fully his theory of and justification for the war, in closing said: "Having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts." It was not long after that when the first disastrous battle of Bull Run was fought; and soon after that came the Balls Bluff disaster, when the brave Colonel Baker, a dear friend of Lincoln's, was killed. Following these disasters came the great pressure for a proclamation of emancipation of the slaves in the rebel states. The President was told that it was God's will that he should issue such a proclamation; but he wanted some evidence of that, saying, "I hope it will not be irreverent for me to say that, if it is probable that God would reveal His will to others on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed He would reveal it directly to me; for unless I am more deceived in myself than I often am, it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is, I will do it." Providence led President Lincoln to prepare a proclamation of emancipation in the summer of 1862, which he submitted to his cabinet; but it was decided to postpone its publication until after some substantial victory should be achieved by the Union army, which would have the effect to revive the spirits of the people and strengthen the administration of the government. The battle of Antietam came in September, and while not an overwhelming Union victory, it really led up to the promulgation of the emancipation proclamation. At the cabinet meeting called to consider the matter, the President, as recorded by Mr. Chase in his diary, said among other things:

"When the rebel army was at Frederick, I determined, as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a procla-

mation of emancipation, such as I thought most likely to be useful. I said nothing to any one, but I made the promise to myself and (hesitating a little) to my Maker. The rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise;" and fulfill it he did. This was the preliminary proclamation, which was made effective on the following first of January, 1863. As to his action President Lincoln said: "I can only trust in God that I have made no mistake." No immediate good to the Union cause followed, but rather darkness and uncertainty. God delayed the revealing of His purposes; but in due time the President's action was vindicated by events.

Notwithstanding the defeat of General Lee at Gettysburg in July, 1863, and the taking of Vicksburg, the same time, by General Grant, and other favorable conditions, when the summer of 1864 came, and Mr. Lincoln had been nominated by the Republicans for re-election, there were grave fears that he would fail to receive an expression of confidence on the part of the people; that he would fail of re-election. This was the feeling of Mr. Lincoln himself. Happily the tide turned in time to save him; and he expressed himself as "deeply thankful to God for the approval of the people." From the first, President Lincoln was controlled by this one idea: that if we do right, God will be with us, and if God is with us we cannot fail. "In great contests," said he, "each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong."

Why the struggle for the maintenance of the Union should be so prolonged he could not understand, unless God's purpose was something different from the purpose of either party. In his second inaugural address he suggests a reason, which can never be forgotten as long as the memory of our first martyr-President shall endure. These are his words: "Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago,

so still it may be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Moses, who led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt to the land of promise, was not permitted, because of a sin committed against God, to enter that land himself; but he was permitted to get a view of it from Pisgah's peak, and then "died there in the land of Moab; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." We know of no sin against God, committed by Abraham Lincoln, the chosen leader of the hosts of Liberty and Union in our great Civil War, which justified his assassination just as his hopes for the preservation of the Union had been so signally realized; it was a dispensation of Divine Providence hard to understand. But if the martyred President could be here to speak, he would, perhaps, console us with this thought:

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His Grace,
Behind a frowning Providence,
He hides a smiling face."

Like Moses, Abraham Lincoln was permitted to reach Pisgah's height and "view the landscape o'er." His heart was filled with inexpressible joy; his countenance changed from that sadness which had so long characterized it; in a word, he was transfigured, his whole being suddenly changing to a condition of serene joy, as he became conscious that the great purpose of his life had been accomplished. Only the joys of heaven itself could be greater. In such a happy condition of soul and body he was summoned to enter heaven's gate and be at rest!

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